

Lincoln Park Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group
Summary Meeting minutes
December 12, 2002

Members present: Rev. Rodney Davis, Merion Green, Linda Martin, Tolu Odunlami, Hazel Offutt, Anita Summerour, Geraldine Evans Wilson

Interested Parties: Anita Neal

Staff: Chris Bartlett, Mayra Bayonet, Judy Christensen, Randy Clay, Jim Wasilak

Opening Remarks/Administrative Items

Chairman Tolu Odunlami opened the meeting, and expressed his regrets at not being able to attend the meeting with the East Rockville Advisory Group. He announced the evening's agenda, which will be a presentation on historic preservation and a discussion of the schedule. Jim Wasilak apologized for the late delivery of the meeting minutes and stressed the importance of the previous meeting, and his hope that the minutes reflect that. Jim noted that since the November 14 meeting, members of the East Rockville and Lincoln Park communities attended the Mayor and Council's General Session on November 26 and requested a traffic study of the industrial area in the Southlawn Lane and Dover Road areas. The purpose would be to resolve the commercial cut-through traffic issues for both neighborhoods that are generated in these areas. Jim noted that the study should not impact the timing of the neighborhood plan. If the Plan is completed before the results of the study, it can always be amended later to reflect the results. Jim distributed a prospective schedule for the remaining Advisory Group meetings.

East Rockville Presentation

Jim Wasilak introduced Judy Christensen, the City's senior historic preservation planner. Judy pointed out that Lincoln Park now has its second designated historic site, the Reuben Hill house at 305 Lincoln Avenue. Judy noted that she spoke at a Lincoln Park Civic Association meeting in July, after which the civic association requested that the community be designated a historic district. The City has hired new staff and applied for a grant from the Maryland Historic Trust to accomplish historical survey work in the spring. The City has asked for funding to prepare a nomination for the National Register of Historic Places. If the nomination passes this test, then the neighborhood is clearly qualified to be a local historic district as well. However, the National Register district allows designated properties to qualify for the associated tax benefits for property improvements, while not requiring architectural approval for new construction. Properties within a City-designated historic district are subject to review and approval by the Historic District Commission (HDC), whose primary responsibility is the protection of the streetscape in the community through application of design guidelines. As an example, Judy pointed out that some of the older homes on Lincoln Avenue have an irregular front setback because it predated any zoning requirements. This is an example of something unique to Lincoln Park that would be incorporated into design guidelines for the neighborhood.

Judy pointed out that some property owners do not like having additional regulations applied to their properties, and discussed her experience with historic designation in Gaithersburg. A majority of residents would have to desire to have designation for it to be successful. The benefits of designation includes an analysis of what the good and bad architectural characteristics of the neighborhood, what should be encouraged or discouraged, and what should become part of specific guidelines for the neighborhood. Historic designation promotes neighborhood stability in that residents build compatible new construction, and the neighborhood attracts new residents that are interested in living in a historic community. The survey work will begin in the spring, with an inventory of each house, and narrow it down to see what is a potential district. A detailed history of the neighborhood will be written to support the National Register nomination. There will be community meetings as well. Judy described a folder of materials that will be distributed to residents that explains the process, tax benefits and design guidelines. Tax benefits include up to 30 percent for interior and exterior maintenance and improvements for owner-occupied property. Benefits up to 50 percent could be approved for income-producing properties such as rental property.

Judy stated that the emphasis would be on the National Register nomination process, which should be acceptable to many residents due to the potential tax credits and lack of additional regulations and approvals. To be eligible, the renovations must meet the Secretary of the Interior's standards, so often it is a benefit to get advice from the HDC even though there may not be a required approval. She emphasized that the intent of designations on Rockville is not to create a Williamsburg-type setting, but to preserve the character of a neighborhood. Hazel Offutt asked how much of the neighborhood would be considered, to which Judy responded that all residences would be considered in the initial inventory. That would narrow down the boundaries based on the findings. She stated that it is easier in the process to begin with a larger area and narrow it down if necessary, rather than to add area later, and cited the example of former Carver High School which started out as designation of the entire 30-acre parcel but concluded with a much smaller land area. She noted that designation, even on the Carver site, does not preclude construction within a designated area but requires review and approval by the HDC.

Judy noted that the City will be a partner with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and has made contact with Stanley Lowe, a Vice-President of the Trust and who has spearheaded a successful revitalization of an African-American neighborhood in Pittsburgh. Mr. Lowe has agreed to speak to the Lincoln Park community during the process. Judy stated that the City has asked for assistance from the Trust to address homeowner concerns and misconceptions about historic designation. She emphasized that the goal will be to make as many residents comfortable with designation as possible, although there always will be some who are not comfortable. Achieving National Register designation will be significant, in that it can allow residents to make improvements and qualify for tax breaks. She cited the town of Washington Grove, which is on the National Register but is not a historic district. This was successful until the demand for houses in the community became strong and the desire increased for new regulations.

Anita Summerour asked whether the design guidelines would affect properties that are not designated. Judy responded that the Secretary's standards are fairly vague, while the City's

guidelines would be more specific based on the character of the homes. Hazel asked about older homes that have been remodeled, and Judy answered that when homes are designated, the condition of the home at that time is what is important, whether it has been remodeled over the years or not. It is hoped that materials would be replaced with authentic materials, but this is not required.

Judy will be writing the Historic Preservation chapter of the Neighborhood Plan. The Fisherman's Cemetery can be considered as well, and Judy noted that other cemeteries in the City have recently been designated. Anita noted that the cemetery is owned by Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, so it may depend on what the church's intentions for the property are. Hazel noted that the cemetery is a part of the neighborhood's history. Judy noted that frequently as the history of a neighborhood comes out, more people become interested. Merion Green noted that many of those buried in Potter's Field that had to be relocated for Wootton Parkway were reburied in Fisherman's Cemetery. Judy stated that African-American cemeteries frequently disappear and need to be documented, such as one at Glenview Mansion. Anita Neal stated that the City had requested approval to do some work in the cemetery recently. Chris Bartlett stated that this may be the work that is to happen to the creek, and perhaps this was for access. Judy said she would bring copies of the folder with information for everyone to the next meeting.

Jim pointed out that often a historic district forms the core of a neighborhood, with a conservation district surrounding it. Staff will bring back some recommendations based on the direction the committee has give. Anita Summerour asked whether this would include subdividing lots, and Jim responded positively. She also noted the new house on Frederick Avenue is a bad example of this type of development. Merion stated about houses that are turned sideways on lots, and that this should be avoided.

Discussion of Future Schedule

Jim stated there were still some important issues to cover, including transportation and the environment, and that there are probably at least three meetings required to cover these issues. After these meetings are completed, staff would take time to assemble a draft plan, meeting with the Advisory Group, who would then host a public meeting. Linda Martin asked that written notices would be sent to all residents, and Jim stated that other methods of publicity such as the cable channel and the Gazette would be used. The Advisory Group would make any changes to the Plan, based on the public comment, and transmit the draft to the Planning Commission and Mayor and Council. Anita Summerour asked that a representative from Ride-On attend the transportation meeting, and perhaps invite the East Rockville group due to the many issues in common. For the revitalization meeting, there should be a presentation about the Lincoln Terrace redevelopment plan. She also asked about public works issues, such as Johnson Drive and parks. These will be discussed at the public facilities discussions. Jim said he would try to arrange for a representative of the MCPS property to attend, and it was suggested that a member of the Cemetery Board also attend.

Chris stated that he is investigating Johnson Drive. No one person owns it, and it is for the ingress and egress of the property owners that are located on it. The City maintains a

prescriptive easement for access. One option is to create a public street there, which would require some property taking to build a standard street. Another option is to pave it like a driveway, with the understanding that the City would use it for access. This is the easiest option. Merion pointed out that the crusher run treatment that the City has been using is illegal for asbestos content, and the City should not be putting this down. One down side of making it a public street is that it encourages parking. Anita Neal asked who owns the property in front of Johnson Drive, and Chris answered that it may be someone named Turner. Geraldine asked how this could be expedited, and Chris responded that it would depend on Public Works and the residents.

Jim stated that the format of the Community Meeting could be determined as that gets closer. Linda asked that there be additional information or an update be sent to the community in advance of the Community Meeting. East Rockville will have one meeting in December and one in January in addition to the Community Meeting. Anita Summerour suggested that there be one more joint meeting, which could be when the Ride-On representative attends. Jim stated that there should be an opportunity for coordination.

Jim reported about the development on Dover Road. The work that is being done on property along Dover is in the City, and has approval for 75,000 square feet of service industrial space, similar to the Kirlin Building nearby (515 Dover). The building is not being constructed now because there are no tenants for the building but the site work is being done now. The 2 building son Gude Drive opposite Dover is also industrial buildings. There are building construction-related tenants signed for the building. Dover does not continue across Gude. The forms are part retail and part offices.

Jim distributed a summary of the decisions that the Advisory Group has made to date, and encouraged everyone to review this.

Next Steps

The Group agreed that the next meeting would be on January 9 at the Lincoln Park Community Center.